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Waldo Sangren Scholar Karen Schaper and the Best and Worst of Times on East Campus

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WMU Alum Karen Schaper  
Wednesday, Feb. 8, 2023 at 2:00 PM  
In-Person at Heritage Hall

_Cassie:_ Okay, so we are recording now. So I'll have you, go ahead and introduce yourself, I'll have you spell your last name too, just so we have it correct later on. And then we'll start with your connection to WMU.

_Karen:_ All right, my name is Karen Kennedy Schaper. I was a student at Western Michigan from 1970 through '73, and then for a Master's degree, '78 through '81.

_Cassie:_ And are you from the Kalamazoo area?

_Karen:_ I am from Saginaw, originally.

_Cassie:_ Okay, so what brought you to WMU? How did you-

_Karen:_ My father. My father, because of some family situations, he wanted me 3 hours away from Saginaw and for my safety. And so he talked with a Dr. Hannah, and Dr. Hannah literally, my dorm, dorm room– Set up for classes, everything when I walked in was there. It was there, it was amazing and I was certainly, surprised at what registration was like the next semester when I did have to-

_Cassie:_ When you had to register yourself, right?

_Karen:_ In person, sitting on the ground with papers-

_Cassie:_ Yeah.

_Karen:_ All around.

_Cassie:_ So, on that sort of track-

_Karen:_ Mm-hm.

_Cassie:_ What are some of your first memories of being on campus then, and starting your career as a student at WMU?

_Karen:_ I think the first thing that I noticed was that you could go to the student center and ask questions of people, where do I get my bus pass? Where do I go for sheets and blankets? And somebody always had the answer. And I really felt good and secure. There was a nice library over in North Hall. Well, the librarians kept it ultra quiet, and I appreciated that, so I frequented that haunt. But I think going from a junior college of a few students to a major university–
Cassie: Mm-hm, yeah, yeah, it’s different.

Karen: Yeah, very different.

Cassie: So where was your dorm at? Where did you stay?

Karen: It was in Stinson. 110 Stinson Hall. First floor.

Cassie: Did you have a roommate?

Karen: I did, her name was Kathy Martinozi, and she decided after a year to go to nursing school, but back in her home near Jackson. Then I was in an apartment, the regular university life.

Cassie: So what are your degrees in? What did you major in?

Karen: Uh, education. I had majors in Early Childhood education, a degree in Home Economics, a degree in Business, business education, and then master's degree was education. And I worked for the Distinguished Professor of Education as his research assistant during those years.

Cassie: And who was that?


Cassie: So you worked pretty closely with him then.

Karen: Yes, very much so, mm-hm.

Cassie: What do you remember about him?

Karen: He was a British gentleman and reminded me of my grandfather. And he was very precise and oh did I have to work up to his specifications! That was an advantage of working for him, I found, because any research assignments that I had to do in the coming years were easy, because he taught me well on how to do them. And I did some ghostwriting too, for him and for others too, little pieces.

Cassie: Ok, so he pushed you, but it prepared you-

Karen: Yes! Yes! He was a taskmaster. And just brilliant. What a brilliant man!

Cassie: Mm-hm.

Karen: And had been published many, many times. He’d walked the walk.

Cassie: Yeah, right. So it’s a very advantageous match to work with him.

Karen: It was. I actually, he was among the professors asking, “Do you know anyone who would be a research assistant?” And one of the other professors told me that, yeah, there’s somebody looking for a research assistant. Then I said “who!?”
So, I actually, went over to his office (knocks on table) and introduced myself. And he was kinda taken aback, but we hit it off right in the first meeting.

Cassie: So going back to your undergrad, you said that you were in education, but also-
Karen: Yes.

Cassie: Business education.
Karen: Business education, yes.

Cassie: And where were some of those classes then? Were some of those classes on East Campus?
Karen: Yes! North Hall and West Hall. And then some on actually, most of the business education was here. Some over in Sangren, as I remember. But yeah, most of them are here.

And I did have three education classes in East Hall. And I’m sitting in here looking at these big windows, and remembering the window we had. Wood, heavy, big, and drafty. And you either sat by the window in the winter and froze, or you sat by the heater and died of heat stroke.

Cassie: There was no happy medium. (Both chuckle)
Karen: There was none, none whatsoever. And it was hot even in the spring term. Lord! But I had a down parka and with the hood, I’d sit by the window and put my hood up. I learned how to deal.

Cassie: Okay, yeah. Whereabouts, were your classes, do you remember?
Karen: All right, I had classroom mathematics, and they were downstairs, I think.

And then I also had classroom music. And that was on the first floor. And the third one, I really can’t remember where we were. By big windows and heaters that worked overtime.

Cassie: Yeah and you also said that you were in North Hall quite a bit.
Karen: I worked in North Hall. I worked for Dr. Robert Trader. He was head of the marketing department. And then I worked for the business department across the way as a secretary, as I had for Dr. Trader.

Cassie: Is this all during your undergrad?
Karen: Mm-hm.

Cassie: Or?
Karen: Undergrad. All undergrad.
Cassie: Okay.
Karen: Mm-hm. The big story on that, that I remember, is I was the first person on campus to use at her work site, an electronic (I’m making quotation marks here) electronic typewriter; which was the first version of computers, and I had the ability to save ten letters. (gasp, both chuckle)

It was so... And actually, the Kalamazoo Gazette came up and wanted to see the secretary working with the electronic typewriter. And so there I was, and I gave a demonstration as to how it works, and I absolutely just puzzled them. I said, now let’s take a rather generic letter and let's change the dear line.

And I said, you can change names or any line in this. You can tailor the paragraphs to another person, but you still will put it back as a letter that you can use again. And they were amazed. Now it seems funny, but then it was a big deal.

Yeah, I was very pleased to have it.

Cassie: Yeah, and where did you work out of during that time?

Karen: North Hall.

Cassie: So that was at North Hall? Okay.

Karen: No, no, North Hall was marketing, it was over in the business in West Hall.

Cassie: Okay, what do you remember about the buildings at that time?

Karen: North Hall was taken care of the best, and I always appreciated that. The janitors were especially good there. East Hall was nice to look at, nice to look down the hill, but you really didn’t wanna have a class in East Hall because you were either gonna freeze or fry.

So I tried to avoid East Hall at all costs. But West Hall, there was nothing unusual about West Hall at all. It was just sort of a generic classroom and office building. I don’t remember much about that at all. I was responsible for the head of the department and then 12 professors. So I was busy.

Cassie: Yeah, it sounds like it. So when you weren't busy with classes and the different jobs that you had, what did you do in your free time? Did you attend any events on campus?

Karen: I was an usher at Miller Auditorium, which was new, and that was a lot of fun. However, other than that, I was studying and working. I didn’t have much free time, I really didn’t.

Cassie: Yeah, when you ushered, were you able to sit in for free, then, on the shows?

Karen: Yes.

Cassie: That’s pretty cool.

Karen: Yes.
**Cassie:** Do you remember any of the shows?

**Karen:** The very first show that I ushered was Hair, and there's full-frontal nudity in Hair, and that caught me off guard, and I was rather shocked. But anyway, some good shows, some good shows.

**Cassie:** Right, and so moving on to graduate studies, what made you decide to get your graduate's degree, Master's degree at WMU?

**Karen:** All right, my husband was taking a degree from Western and he eventually became an administrator here. And since we were here, I thought, well, why not? Because that's something I had always wanted to do, the master's degree, and it worked out really well. But I think at that time, when I was in school, my husband had two jobs and I had three.

**Cassie:** Wow, you guys were very busy.

**Karen:** Yes.

**Cassie:** So did you meet in Kalamazoo?

**Karen:** No, in Saginaw.

**Cassie:** In Saginaw, okay. So you moved back home for a little while?

**Karen:** I did for just a little while, I taught, my first teaching job was in Standish, Michigan, and then I taught and I was laid off. And then I taught in Freeland, Michigan, and I was laid off. And then I taught in Saginaw, and I was laid off. Then I thought, well, I'm gonna take a little break from education.

But every time I'd get that feeling, there would be something sort of pushing me, like an opportunity existed, and I was just pushed towards it, so.

**Cassie:** So did the Master's degree sort of help avoid being laid off in some instances?

**Karen:** No, actually, because the criteria was last hired, first fired. So you may have been at a school for a couple of years and then let go. But then when we moved down here and when I finished the Master's, I taught for 28 years in Augusta.

**Cassie:** Wow, okay. So that was much longer than the jobs before that.

**Karen:** Yes. Yep, I found my niche.

**Cassie:** Yeah, so obviously, you were very busy during that time, but I'm wondering how would you describe that experience other than very busy? How would you describe your years as a graduate student at WMU?
Karen: Years as a graduate student, not much sleep. Scheduling was everything, and then finding jobs to revolve around the classes that you were taking.

Cassie: Right, yes, what jobs were you working at that time?

Karen: I worked for Dr. Travers as the research assistant, then I was a bartender at Schwarz's Chalet, which is no longer here, think there's a rice kitchen or something on that spot.

And then I substitute taught, and then I worked as a picture framer for PJ's Frame-Up here in town. They weren't all together, but I was constantly with three jobs, and then the Master's work too, full schedule on that. Both my husband and I burned the midnight oil a lot.

Cassie: Yeah, and other than you mentioned the professors that you worked with or worked for, do you remember any other professors or faculty that had an impact on you?

Karen: My goodness, yes, Mary Cordier and Mary Lou Stewart, education professors. Sherwood Cordier was Mary's husband, and he was in history. She was in education, Mary Lou Stewart was in education. And of all people, Mary Cordier was the first person to tell me… (pause) I ever did anything well.

Cassie: Yeah.

Karen: (choking up) They were the very first person in my life.

Cassie: Wow.

Karen: So Western became my family. She was a wonderful individual, and I never knew I had any talents in the world, but I was a Sangren scholar as well. And so I had to write in my undergrad years for that, and I managed to publish, actually, as an undergrad.

Cassie: So you met her in your undergrad?

Karen: Yes. She just guided me along, and so did Mary Lou. And they had all the answers that I needed.

Cassie: What do you remember about them as people, too?

Karen: Mary was as long-suffering a person as you could imagine, but some of her students were academically inclined, and she would let them know about it, too, she was very honest. Mary Lou Stewart, my goodness, she was a library of information, especially for things that I was writing, so, yeah, they really guided me.

Cassie: Yeah, do you remember first meeting them, what that was that like?

Karen: In class, I had a class with Mary, and then I had to go to her office for something. I know, what was I being called to the office for? I've done something wrong? It's got to be,
well, I got there and I met Mary Lou, and they said, "We’d like you to know we’ve put your name forth for consideration for the Waldo Sangren Scholarship," there were five of us.

Cassie: Really? Do you remember the other ones?

Karen: No, I don’t, they’re all different departments. And this is kind of neat, because of that, I had lunch with Mary and Mary, and Flossy Sangren and Mrs. Dwight Waldo.

Cassie: Really?!

Karen: I did, down at the park club or the woman’s library downtown. Yes, they were still alive, that would have been 1970. Yeah, it was terrific.

Cassie: Wow. Yeah, what was it like meeting them?

Karen: I don’t think I spoke two words.

Cassie: Really?

Karen: I had so much regard for them. So, I was so honored, my gosh. And I remember I had to hustle up clothing because the bell-bottom jeans and turtleneck sweaters were not gonna cut it, so-

Cassie: For that meeting, no.

Karen: I gotta go shopping,

Cassie: So you got a whole new outfit for it?

Karen: I did, absolutely. Something very correct.

Cassie: Yeah, do you remember what they… the impression that they gave when you first met them?

Karen: Just happy, welcoming, very welcoming, I mean. And very helpful, not only in subject matters, but if you had problems with anything else, they would help you there, too.

Cassie: Wow. And what year was that?

Karen: 1970 or ‘71, either.

Cassie: Okay, early on in your undergrad?

Karen: Yeah, I have a talent for writing and that showed up.

Cassie: And they recognized it?

Karen: They did.
Cassie: Yeah, so that leads me into one of the questions that I really wanted to ask, which is, what do you think or who impacted you the most during your time at WMU whether it be a person, a place, something that happened?

Karen: Just the university in general, no matter where I went, I knew people. It was welcoming, I got to know the librarians very well, especially the North Hall librarian. But I wouldn't say, I was as social as a lot of the other students, I didn't have time.

But I will tell you that I frequented on the way home, a place that is no longer there, the Knollwood Tavern.

Cassie: I've heard that from a few people!

Karen: You learned just as much about human behavior there than you would in any class, so it was an education.

Cassie: People watching?

Karen: Sure, we were all students, we all shared info. One thing I do wanna get out before we have to end our time…

Cassie: Yes, of course.

Karen: I was in the very first women's studies class.

Cassie: Really?

Karen: Very first one.

Cassie: What was that like?

Karen: It was amazing. Okay, women's studies, one of the humanities, okay? Well, I showed up, and the first day, there were about 40 students, and Nita Hardy, was the professor.

And we walked in, and we had no curriculum, there was none.

Cassie: You guys were like the guinea pigs.

Karen: That was our job, yes, the first semester was to set up a curriculum of those things that we thought were important. There were all different kinds of ideas that showed up with the people. There were four young men that were in the class that I can remember, and they didn't show up the second class, they sort of transferred.

But we had women signed up, young women, and we all had different expectations for the class. And when we broke into groups and started throwing down ideas. Things that should be included in a woman's study class, there were people who absolutely thought that was a horrible thing we should never study about, they were anti-feminists. And then we had the feminist group, and-
Cassie: So two ends of the spectrum.

Karen: That’s right, exactly, in one class and we look forward to sort of putting the ideas together. How can we cover all of this during one class? Unfortunately, the antifeminists one by one left class because we were getting into women’s rights. And at that time, Roe v. Wade had not been decided.

And so we were very strident, we demonstrated for women’s rights. And I learned a lot from… learned a lot from other young women, from different socioeconomic positions than myself. And it was tremendous. We went to see Betty Friedan.

I think she was at Wayne State and a van full of students went one night. And I kinda think Gloria Steinem was there as well, but I do not remember her as much as I do Betty Friedan. She was quite on fire. Yeah, very committed.

Cassie: So what did a class like that look like? What did you guys talk about then with two polarized polar opposites like that?

Karen: We started out with women’s rights throughout history. That was very interesting. Things that I had never read about, never heard talked about. If I had talked with my grandmother, maybe I would have known these things, but I didn’t.

And then we looked at a lot of data on what women were doing either job-wise or family-wise at this particular time. And then we started looking at the women’s rights movement and what was happening all over the country.

Cassie: Right, at the time because it’s the second wave feminism.

Karen: Exactly. Yes. So by the time we were done, we had a darn good curriculum. We really did. And yeah it would last for years. Yeah. I mean, it was generic enough.

Cassie: Yeah.

Karen: But I distinctly remember one woman that attended class once and she thought women’s studies was gonna be examining the roles of the mother of a family and what the history was behind that. You can see definitely she would have thought that anyway. Yeah.

Cassie: Did she stay in the class?

Karen: No, she did not. She didn’t wanna even think about it. And she was a “tutter” (makes “tut” sounds). I remember her making sounds as we were talking about things.

Cassie: Wow. It’s interesting, too, that a class filled with women could be so polarized on women’s rights like that.

Karen: You have no idea. You have no idea. Women’s rights were a threat to a lot of women. They had to step outside their comfort zone. And back then, there weren’t many stepping outside their comfort zones.
**Cassie:** Right. Yeah, or breaking away from what they were taught by their parents and stuff like that.

**Karen:** Yes. Now, that’s something, though, that in my family, all of my aunts (and there were six of them) were educated. And, these people were born 1900 to 1915 or even before but they had to be educated. My grandfather saw to it that they were educated. My uncles had to be educated. And so there was no difference in the women’s and the men’s studies.

**Cassie:** Was that expectation put on you as well, that you would go on?

**Karen:** Yes. There was never any question that I would go on. My father was very good. Well, he was a journalist. He was good at writing and helped me greatly. My skills I’d owe to him.

**Cassie:** Yeah. It’s like, got the writing skills from your father and then they were fostered at WMU, sorta.

**Karen:** Yes!

**Cassie:** Right. So I just have a few more questions since we’re coming to the end of our time. I wanted to ask now what is that like, 40 to 50 years later from when you were an undergrad and then a grad?

**Karen:** Is it 50 years this year? It may be, yeah. I think it’s 50 years this year! Oh!! My.

**Cassie:** Yeah. (Both chuckling)

**Karen:** I feel older.

**Cassie:** Well, how… obviously, your perspective has changed and I’m wondering how it’s changed. How do you view your time at WMU now versus when you were in it/when you were a student?

**Karen:** My time at WMU was wonderful. It was so full of so many different things to learn and to do. It opened up every door and I was lucky enough to be able to study in areas that I would have no degree in. My father believed in education for education’s sake.

And so I went into unusual classes and foreign to me, really, and the learning. And now East Hall, Heritage Hall is a marvelous place. And I’m very happy that they left the façade of North Hall so it feels like home.

Do you want a naughty story?

**Cassie:** Sure, yeah! (laughing)

**Karen:** I probably did the worst thing that’s ever been done to East Hall. It was in the fall of 1972 and a nice warm night and there was a young man that lived across the hall from us in an apartment.
He just called up, “who wants to go for a motorcycle ride?” I poked my head out the door. I said, “Yeah, you know. I’m up for it. Let’s go!” We did. He had a nice Harley and we were tooling all around campus. And then somehow we got into Vine Street and I was hanging on for dear life to him.

But then he says, “Okay, hold on.” I held on to him. He on the Harley Davidson, came up this hill from Vine Street, okay. And at that time, I was a Waldo Sangren scholar and I knew for sure I was gonna be booted. My Lord. And so I thought he was gonna come up through the parking lots and simply go down in a bit.

No. He went down the hill with me screaming behind him, just in terror. But I got down to the bottom of the hill and I thought, “What have I done?” So I wanna tell you, I kept myself real small and guarded for quite a while.

Cassie: Yeah. (Both laughing)
Karen: I don't think anybody has ever done that here. I hope they don't.
Cassie: Just in the grass, then.
Karen: Yes it was on the grass. My gosh. I’m lucky he didn’t go down the steps.
Cassie: Yeah. You’d just go “Uh uh uh uh uh…” (Both laughing)
Karen: Yeah, exactly “Duh duh duh duh duh…” No. So that was, yeah, I think probably the worst thing that a student ever did to East Hall, yeah. What was I thinking?
Cassie: It’s a step up from the sledding stories that I’ve heard.
Karen: Or skiing.
Cassie: Really?
Karen: Yeah! There were kids that would bring them up, and they would snow plow. I can still remember them snow plowing down. But that was usually late afternoon. And a lot of the professors had gone, and they were left on their own.

And there was a ski hill over on West Campus, quite near the medical the clinic Syndecuse. And there was a hill there that kids ski. So yeah, we were a skiing bunch.

Cassie: Really?
Karen: Mm-hm, and have you heard of traying?
Cassie: I’m not sure.
Karen: You took a tray from the cafeteria.
Cassie: Oh, right.
Karen: Brought it up here to the top of the hill, and you slid down on the cafeteria tray.

Cassie: I have heard that before, actually.

Karen: It happens.

Cassie: What was it in the Walwood union?

Karen: Yes.

Cassie: Yeah.

Karen: Go missing all the time, it's amazing. “Hm, where are these going?” Yeah, yeah, they could've been nice and given them back, but youthful ignorance.

Cassie: People would keep them and use them and stuff?

Karen: Absolutely, yeah. Take the tray out, you weren't going to give it up.

Cassie: Right.

Karen: Yeah, mm-mm.

Cassie: So I just have one more question. Do you have any other memories or any last stories that you wanted to share? Were there any topics that we didn't touch on that you wanted to finish with?

Karen: I don't think so. Any other stories? Oh! I was active in protests against Vietnam and a lot of our demonstrations were over by Miller Auditorium because it made better pictures, better photos.

Cassie: Yes, especially the new auditorium.

Karen: Yes, yes. And that was very, very enlightening. I think that probably had a huge effect on my life.

Cassie: Right, yeah, I was going to ask that, too. Because the timing that you were at school during the Vietnam War and then second-wave feminism, all of these social justice issues that are happening, what was it like living through those but in college as a student?

Karen: It was maddening. And I said, my senior picture looks like I'm a bulldog because I was honeyed and sweetied by the photographer. And that's just one example. Women's athletics were not supported well at all, I remember. I don't know what else I can say about that. But very few women in business, as I remember. In the sciences, very few.

Cassie: Right.

Karen: Yeah, and how that's changed, it's wonderful, wonderful.

Cassie: Yeah, well, thank you so much for sitting with me and talking-
**Karen:** Thank you.

**Cassie:** With me today. I really appreciate it. I loved the stories that you had. I’ve never talked to anybody that has met the wives of Dwight B Waldo and-

**Karen:** Yes, and Flossie Sangren.

**Cassie:** And yes, Flossie. I've heard stories, I've read stories of them, obviously in the books and written records and whatnot, but I haven't ever talked to anybody who's met them before, so that was very interesting.

**Karen:** They had lunch with all five of the Waldo Sangren scholars. What a treat. What a marvelous, marvelous thing. And both of the women were so highly educated. I was so happy to see that.

**Cassie:** Right, especially for what you were going, the timing, too, but then also what you were going for.

**Karen:** Yes.

**Cassie:** Wow, real role models.

**Karen:** They were, they were.

**Cassie:** Wow, yeah, well, thank you so much for sitting with me-

**Karen:** Well, thank you!

**Cassie:** It’s been a pleasure. I really appreciate it, yes.

**Karen:** Yeah, yep, I’m happy to share a story.